

By W.D. MacBride
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In order not to write a book, this article will have to be confined to the activities of the White Pass & Yukon Route, which since 1898 has been so closely combined with the economy of the Yukon Territory of Canada that it is almost impossible to avoid other historical events, yet a few must be mentioned.

When George Washington Carmack and two Indians, Skookum Jim, to whom credit is given for the actual discovery, and Tagish Charlie, found large deposits of placer gold on Bonanza Creek, a tributary of the Klondike River, on August 17th, 1896, they inaugurated the famous 'Klondike Gold Rush' and the development of the little known Yukon Territory of Canada. Robert Henderson, having found gold in nearby localities of the Yukon Territory, has always been considered the original discoverer.

There was a frenzied rush from the United States and Canada to this new Mecca, a rush which rivalled California's "49". Closely following came the necessary transportation and it was thus that the White Pass & Yukon Route became the lifeline to the Yukon and, with its many ramifications, has played a very important part in the development of the Yukon Territory and Alaska.

In the spring of 1898 the White Pass & Yukon Route was organized. On May 27th, 1898, men, horses, and material were landed at Skagway, Alaska, on tide-water of the Pacific Ocean, and the following morning the ribbons of steel were pointed North through the White Pass. On July 21st, 1898, the first train was placed in commission and operated for a distance of four miles. This was quite an historic event as it was the first railroad train carrying passengers ever operated in Alaska or so far north anywhere on the American continent.

The railroad reached the Summit of White Pass on February 18th, 1899, and the head of Lake Bennett on July 6th, 1899. The construction between Caribou Crossing (now known as Carcross) and Whitehorse was completed on June 8th, 1900, and the Bennett to Carcross section received the golden spike on July 29th, 1900.

During the period of construction a winter horse drawn freight service, known as the 'Red Line Transportation Co.' was operated from the various railheads to Carcross over the ice of Lake Bennett. The following is the legend on back of a pass issued to one Arthur Copeland, in the winter of 1899 for a trip on the 'Red Line' from Bennett to Carcross, signed by M.J. Heney, who built the White Pass Railway.

"Conditions

This pass is not transferable, must be signed in ink or blood by the undersigned person who thereby accepting and using it assumes all risks of damage to person and baggage. The holder must be ready to "mush" behind at the crack of the driver's whip. "Dewar Crown Scotch" and "Concha De Ragelias" carried as side arms are subject to inspection, and may be tested by the officials of the road or their duly authorized representatives.

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Passengers falling into the mud must first find themselves, and then remove the soil from their garments as the Red Line Transportation Company does not own the country and the authorities are not giving it to "cheechacos".

No passengers allowed to make any remarks if the horses climb a tree, and each one must retain his seat if the sled drops through the ice, until the bottom of the lake is reached, when all are expected to get out and walk ashore.

The holder hereof may gaze upon the mountain scenery, or may absorb the Italian summer, and if specially desirous, may be permitted to watch the gleaming Northern Lights. If the passenger has but one lung he will have permission to inhale the fresh air to capacity of said lung, but no more will be allowed.

I accept the above conditions.

(sgd.) _____

From sea level at Skagway, Alaska, this narrow gauge railroad (gauge 36 inches) ascends to a summit of 2,885 feet in the first 21 miles but its highest elevation is reached at Log Cabin, British Columbia, Mile Post 33, altitude 2,916 feet. The average grade from Skagway dock to the Summit is 2.6%, the steepest grade about 4%. The cost of the road from Skagway to Summit was over \$100,000 per mile. From Summit to Whitehorse, while the cost per mile was less, it was still greatly in excess of the cost of similar construction in the United States. The railway is 110.7 miles long, 20.4 miles in Alaska, 32.2 miles in British Columbia and 58.1 miles in Yukon Territory. Total cost of the line from Skagway to Whitehorse was approximately ten million dollars, plus another two and one half million for equipment.

The building of the White Pass Railroad was attended by more than ordinary difficulties. It was a thousand miles from supply bases and there was no telegraph lines connecting this area with the United States or Canada in 1898. Steamer sailings were irregular and freight space at a premium. There were no bulldozers, carryalls and other similar equipment, and the building of the road was accomplished with axes, picks, and shovels, horses, and wheel and hand scrapers and dynamite. On August 8th, 1899, fifteen hundred employees grabbed their picks and shovels and started off pell-mell on a gold stampede to Atlin, British Columbia. Thus, only a few men were left on the job and it was immediately necessary to attempt to fill the vacancies and also to replace the picks and shovels.

Nearly all the work between Skagway and Summit was in the solid rock. Immense quantities of powder were used for blasting. In one case a cliff 120 feet in height, 70 feet in depth and 20 feet in thickness was blasted away. In some instances the mountain sides were so steep that men were suspended by ropes to prevent their falling down the mountain while cutting the grades.

Sixteen miles from Skagway occurs the first and only tunnel on the line. This tunnel is 250 feet long and probably no tunnel in the world was ever built under greater difficulties. Supplies and machinery had to be hoisted up the steepest hill imaginable.

A short distance from the Summit a deep V shaped canyon is spanned by a steel cantilever bridge 215 feet from the creek bed, at that time the most northerly bridge of its type and height in the world. Looking down - down - down - the old White Pass Trail is well defined, in Dead Horse Gulch, where so many pack animals were sacrificed in the days before the rails were placed.

Building the road around Lake Bennett was no small job. Again, there was much rock work, cutting off cliffs, and quick-sand along the lake shore, but the only special event was the sinking of a train with all hands. A heavy fill had been placed across one of the numerous bays, which stood solid under work trains. Then, one day, it suddenly sank under water, taking with it the train - all except the engine and front cars - only one man went down with the cars. Being a White Pass man he calmly swam ashore, shook himself and said "Well, I 'll be d---d". All but one of cars were recovered, and for all we know that car is still operating under the icy waters of Lake Bennett.

All told there were 35,000 men at work on this line, from say June 1st, 1898 to October 1st, 1900, and of this number there were only 35 deaths from all causes, including sickness as well as accidents. A very intelligent class of workmen were employed. A large proportion were men anxious to reach the gold fields, who did not care to start down river until the opening of navigation. Many who worked during the summer months were those whose funds had become exhausted and were working to replenish their capital to furnish a grub stake for prospecting. No Asiatic labour was employed on the railroad.

THE FIRST TRAIN

by Samuel H. Graves, First President.

In the Pass, the whistle has sounded,
There are not more heights to scale;
The work beyond is but children's play,
A race over hill and dale.
The child has been helping its father
As in days that are past and gone,
And the gateway is proudly opened
That leads to the great Yukon.

O'er head there are twin flags flying
To honour the winter day,
There is honor for each one present,
And for many far way.
There is honor for all the leaders
For those who schemed and planned,
As well as for those who found the coin
And for those who took command.

There is honor too for the workers,
With transit, level and rod,
Who scaled the hills where the ravens nest,
And never a foot had trod.
Who carved from the buttressed mountain side,
With a patience most sublime,
Mid the wintry storms and piercing cold,
A road that shall last for time.

There is honor for the workers,
With pick and powder and spade,
Who hewed and blasted the storm scarred rocks
And trimmed up the winding grade;
For each man took his life in his hands
When he daily went to work,
And never a man of all was found
From a danger-post to shirk.

There is honor for all the army,
 For the living and the dead;
 For some of high as of low degree
 The grade to the graveyard led.
 But courage and science have conquered
 While people have laughed and jeered
 At the men who had faith and patience
 And never trembled or feared.

'Tis a thing they may all remember
 And every man will be proud,
 In the years to come to tell his boys,
 That he was one of the crowd,
 Not many can say they have labored,
 More steadfastly heart and soul,
 Than the men who fought to unite the south
 To the country 'round the pole.

When the railroad reached Whitehorse in the spring of 1909, the steamers that had operated on Lake Bennett to Canyon City just above Miles Canyon, and the Tram Lines that hauled the freight on wooden rails around Miles Canyon, ceased their operations south of Whitehorse. Many of the steamers dared the Canyon and Whitehorse Rapids to operate between Whitehorse and Dawson City. The need for larger equipment was apparent and in 1901 the British Yukon Navigation Co. was organized as the River Division of the WP&YR, and ever since has been the main supply line with a large fleet of steamers and barges plying the Yukon River and tributaries to points north of Whitehorse, as well as the Atlin district, connected by lakes with Carcross.

In March, 1901, this Company took over the winter stage line of the Canadian Development Co. and operated horse-drawn vehicles during the closed season of navigation between Whitehorse and Dawson City. This operation was known as "The Royal Mail Service" and was discontinued in the spring of 1921 - Vide the old stage and passenger sleigh near the Whitehorse depot, and old relics in the Whitehorse Museum -- This winter "overland trail" service was continued by various mail contractors with trucks, caterpillar trains, etc., until the spring of 1937, when the WP & YR entered the plane business, and carried all classes of mail freight, express and passengers up to December, 1941, at which time the Canadian Pacific Air Lines took over.

In the spring of 1914 the WP&YR purchased the river steamer holdings in Alaska of the Northern Navigation Co. and operated in Alaska waters under the name of the American Yukon Navigation Co. After the completion of the Alaska Railroad from Seward to Fairbanks, the river business was gradually discontinued, and now the WP&YR does not operate any steamers between Dawson City and points on the Yukon River in Alaska except an occasional chartered service.

Alaska Highway Service.

When the Alaska Highway was completed the WP&YR were the first to organize a Highway Division and to operate busses, vans, refrigerators, trucks, oil tankers, etc. on any portions of the new highways as they gradually are completed.

In October, 1945, the WP&YR sent the first commercial passenger bus from Whitehorse to Dawson Creek, the southern terminal of the Alaska Highway. Since that date this Company has operated a scheduled service and it is possible to travel via bus from Whitehorse to any point in the United States or Canada,

reached by bus transportation. In addition to passengers, the busses carry local mail between Dawson Creek, B.C., and the Alaska border, thus furnishing a rural free delivery, with facilities for money orders, stamps and parcels post. This is said to be the longest rural free delivery in the world - 1,221 miles.

During the winter months, under contract with Canadian Postal Department, through mail trucks are also operated between Dawson Creek, northern terminal of Northern Alberta Railways, and Whitehorse, thus augmenting the mail service handled by Coastal steamship companies between Vancouver, B.C. and Skagway, Alaska, with mail destined to Yukon Territory.

At Whitehorse a large modern Bus Hangar and Garage with complete shop facilities for all types of servicing, repairs and construction, is maintained.

As new highways are made available, whenever warranted, all types of highway vehicles will be utilized, including the Mayo and Dawson City areas of the Yukon Territory.

Petroleum Division

This Division of the WP&YR, now known as Yukon Petroleum Distributors, was organized in the fall of 1941, in order to handle the tremendous quantities of gasoline and petroleum products required for the U.S. Air Transport Command, U.S. Air Force, Royal Canadian Air Force, commercial aviation companies, U.S. Army Highway construction, and Yukon Territory commercial use. In those days gasoline arrived in Skagway in drums shipped by the shipload and on arrival at Whitehorse was placed in caches over a ten mile area. Later developments have brought the gasoline to Skagway in Tanker Ships, and the railway forwards it to Whitehorse in many tank cars. Stove oil and diesel oils are piped from Skagway to Whitehorse, where they are stored in tanks for distribution.

Future Plans of the White Pass and Yukon Route.

The White Pass and Yukon Route is now a Canadian Company, known as "The White Pass and Yukon Corporation, Limited." Its directors are prominent and successful business men of Canada, and they are working on a definite progressive plan of modernization of the railroad; new diesel engines are under construction; new ties and rails are being installed; buildings and equipment are being renewed and improved.

Immense bodies of ore in the Yukon Territory and Northern British Columbia are being investigated; gold, silver, lead, zinc, nickel, cobalt, asbestos, copper, tungsten, titanium and antimony, -- to mention a few. Large hydro-developments are in the offing.

While river steamers have a habit of resigning in favour of highways, they still churn the waters of the Yukon River and Tagish Lake. There are ore deposits along the Yukon River and the ore must be moved to railhead, and the mines must have their supplies. The last stand of the stern-wheelers in North America is yet most interesting to travellers, and the river trip between Whitehorse and fabulous Dawson City is still available to the many visitors who wish to visit the scene of the world's greatest gold rush. The paddle wheels may spin for another decade.

The future of the Yukon north is a bright one and the White Pass and Yukon Route will assist this march of progress in every way.

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